

HAND IN HAND



Building the Foundation

In the October 2005 issue, I described the beginnings of an ongoing relationship—a marriage—between curriculum and technology that has resulted in an integrated and consistent curriculum from PK–12 in the Plano ISD.

In this column, I'll share some of the processes involved with the restructuring of our elementary curriculum and the role of technology in the classroom. When Plano ISD committed time, talent, and technology to a new educational vision, the Elementary Integrated Curriculum project was born. The goal: to integrate subject matter and technology into a student-centered classroom with meaningful content, enriched environment, choices for learning, multiple activities, and varied assessment strategies.

A group of 30 K–5 classroom teachers and curriculum specialists began by studying research in curriculum integration, learning styles, multiple intelligences, and how children learn.

At the time—in the 1990s—little quality software was available for the major ideas the teacher curriculum writers wanted to pursue. Consequently, they also learned to write specifications for software and to work with software developers. During a period of five years, this team of teachers and coordinators wrote six, six-week units of study for each grade level based in both U.S. and Texas learning standards. The universal organizing ideas for the teaching units span grades K–5 and are supported by software. They are diversity, continuity and change, interactions, systems, communication, and balance and stability.

Teachers involved in the project became trainers and models for all district teachers in cur-

riculum content, instructional methods, and use of technology. The district equipped each elementary classroom with eight computers, a VCR, a laserdisc player, a large screen monitor, Internet access, video streaming, and local and wide area network connections. The challenge was to ensure that technology is an integral and natural part of student instruction.

After the completion of the software, we developed a curriculum planner that houses all the elementary curriculum and makes it available online to all teachers on their desktops.

The content and teaching strategies are updated regularly—daily, monthly, yearly—depending on need. Subject area coordinators update the online curriculum based on input from teachers and changes in state standards. Because classroom instruction is technology dependent, all software is updated yearly.

Software is evaluated using these questions:

- Does it work with our written curriculum?
- Is it easy to use?
- Will it engage students?
- Will it help to increase student achievement?

Creating an elementary curriculum and instructional program that provides for a deep understanding of meaningful content and that fully integrates with technology has required a multi-year commitment—much like a lasting marriage—to ongoing professional development and continual updating of content, instructional activities, and technology.

Future columns will describe the process used over a period of several years for middle school and high school curriculum improvement.

By Marilyn Brooks

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